

Ge
974.5
R342
no.1
Ser.1
1829559

M. L.

REYNOLDS HISTORICAL
GENEALOGY COLLECTION

✓

ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 1833 01105 4555

110

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center

RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL TRACTS

NO. 1. *Series 1.*

PROF. DIMAN'S ADDRESS

AT THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

OF THE

CAPTURE OF GENERAL PINSOFT BY LT. COL. BARTON

WILLIAMS

BALLADS RELATING TO THE ENLIGHTENED



1829559

THE CAPTURE OF GENERAL RICHARD PRESCOTT
BY LT.-COL. WILLIAM BARTON.

AN

ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT THE

CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION OF THE EXPLOIT

AT

PORTSMOUTH, R. I., JULY 10, 1877,

BY

J. LEWIS DIMAN.

PROVIDENCE:
SIDNEY S. RIDER.
1877.



Copyright by
SIDNEY S. RIDER,
1878.

1167790

ILLUSTRATIONS.

PORTRAIT OF LIEUTENANT-COLONEL WILLIAM BARTON

MAP OF RHODE ISLAND AND ROUTE OF THE EXPEDITION.

FAC SIMILE OF THE ORDER TO BARTON.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

THE object of this series is to preserve in a neat and inexpensive form some of the labors of our citizens in matters of historical enquiry. It frequently happens that laborious research has been made, and much thought bestowed upon these subjects. Having served the purpose of the occasion these carefully gathered facts have been allowed to relapse into their former chaotic condition, to form in after years the object of other researches by succeeding antiquaries. To assist in the preservation of the fruit of these labors is the desire of the publisher. Professor Diman's Address will be followed by a paper on the Northmen in New England, by Alexander Farnum, Esq. The third of the series will be the Journal of Lieutenant James M. Hadden, of the Royal Artillery during Burgoyne's campaign, which is in the possession of Gen. Horatio Rogers, and which will be edited by its owner. If these ventures prove successful, others will follow which we trust may be interesting to our citizens.

PROVIDENCE. December, 1877.

THE OCCASION.

THE occasion which gave rise to the following address was the celebration of the centenary of the capture of Major-General Richard Prescott by Lieutenant-Colonel William Barton. The celebration was under the auspices of the First Light Infantry Veteran Association of Providence, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Staples, the members of the Rhode Island Historical Society participating by invitation of the Veteran Association. It took place at Portsmouth, Rhode Island, July 10th, 1877. (The capture took place during the night of the 9th July, 1777.) The Veterans were led by their drum band, dressed in the old Continental uniform, dark brown coats of velvet, leather-colored knee breeches, and three cornered hats.

The entire party, numbering in all upwards of three hundred, embarked on the steámbóat Richard Borden and were carried to Bristol Ferry, whence they were taken by the railway cars to the scene of the exploit.

Soon after their arrival a platform was improvised by the use of an ancient ammunition box, from which Professor Diman

delivered his address. At its close the party proceeded to the orchard, a short distance below the house, where ample tables were laid and an excellent Rhode Island shore dinner, prepared by Mr. Hiram Maxfield (of celebrity in this art), was partaken of by the party. The physical requirements of the inner man being satisfied, intellectual pleasures were again resorted to, and after-dinner speeches and poems were given by several gentlemen. Mention may be made of His Excellency Governor Van Zandt, the Right Reverend Bishop Clark, Ex-Governor Henry Howard, Ex-Lieutenant Governor Samuel G. Arnold, the Honorable William Paine Sheffield, Zachariah Allen, Esquire, and Mr. William Barton, a great-grandson of the gallant officer in whose honor these proceedings took place. Poems were read by George W. Pettes, Esquire, and the Reverend Frederick Denison. The party returned to Providence by the same conveyances used in going from the city, arriving at six o'clock in the evening, after a day of real pleasure.

RHODE ISLAND

HISTORICAL TRACTS.

NO. 1.



PROVIDENCE:
SIDNEY S. RIDER.
1877.

ADDRESS.

AFTER the lapse of a century we are gathered upon this spot, where historic memories are blended with so many natural charms, to commemorate an achievement, which not only ranks as the most gallant in our local annals, but which has been praised by perhaps the most temperate of our American historians as one of the boldest, best executed and most successful adventures of the Revolutionary struggle. It is meet that the hundredth anniversary of such an enterprise should not pass unnoticed. The impulse is as natural as it is becoming which leads us to look back with pride to our own past, and cherish the heroic examples which our fathers have bequeathed us. In doing this, we need not exaggerate their merit; we need not allow the

pardonable enthusiasm which an occasion like this inspires, to betray us into any disproportioned estimate of the significance of the event which we have come to celebrate. It was not a turning point in the long struggle for liberty; it had none of the momentous consequences that were involved in other transactions of the same year, the year which marked the crisis of the contest, the year in which the capitulation of Burgoyne condemned the good-natured Lord North to an old age of self-reproach, for having sacrificed his own better judgment to the importunity of an obstinate king, and determined France not only to acknowledge, but to support the cause of American independence. But the legacies handed down to us from the past are not all alike; they address different parts of our nature, and deserve to be prized on wholly different grounds. Besides the great movements of history, movements which result from complex combinations of causes, which illustrate general laws, and which can only be interpreted after comprehensive study, there is always a play of individual forces, which if less significant in their bearing on the grand result, appeal

more directly to our sympathies, and call forth a heartier recognition. Even modern warfare, which makes so much of its masterly strategy, still leaves ample scope for the exhibition of personal prowess. The great figure of Washington himself seems less distinct in the wise delays by which he secured the triumph of our arms, than in the winter night, when he flung himself across the half-frozen Delaware; and the brilliant campaigns of Greene in the Carolinas make no such impression on the imagination, as the single act which lifted Barton from obscurity to perpetual fame.

Let us estimate at its true value the enterprise which we have come to commemorate to-day; an enterprise leading to no important political or military results, yet deserving to be kept forever in remembrance as showing what manner of men they were who dared hurl defiance in the face of a powerful empire, and who waged a successful contest with resolute and highly disciplined foes. What they did a hundred years of the history of a united and independent nation remains to show; what they were can be best learned from such exhibitions of indi-

vidual daring and resolution as have made this a memorable spot, not only in Rhode Island, but in American history. It was in truth an achievement so bold, so simple, so successful, that a brief recital of its leading incidents would perhaps convey the best eulogy upon those who planned and executed it. Yet to take in the full measure of their merit, we need to call to mind all the difficulties which they encountered. Let us then go back and seek to place ourselves in their position, and picture to ourselves the stirring panorama spread before their gaze a century ago. How striking the contrast between the martial spectacle which they beheld, and the peaceful landscape which presents such inviting features to our eyes.

It is hard for us to realize to-day that when the sun rose on the July mornings of 1777, its early beams glanced on the glittering bayonets of a powerful British army holding this whole Island, and on the tapering masts of a numerous fleet commanding yonder familiar waters. Yet such was the fact, a fact sorrowfully impressed on the minds of all who were living in those troublous times. In

December of the preceding year, two English and two Hessian brigades under the command of Sir Henry Clinton, with Earl Percy and General Prescott* as his immediate subordinates, passed through Long Island Sound in seventy transports, and entered Narragansett Bay. They were convoyed by Sir Peter Parker, with eleven ships of war, and passing round the north end of Conanicut, effected their main landing not far from the spot where we are now assembled. A large portion of the troops were quartered in farm houses on the Island. To an array so overwhelming no effectual resistance could be offered, and the American forces withdrew to the main land, while the armed vessels in the bay, the early contribution of Rhode Island to an American navy, were driven to seek shelter at Providence. Our little State was thus arrayed in two hostile camps. True this apparent triumph of the British proved in the end a most efficient auxilliary to our

*General Richard Prescott was at the time of his capture a Brigadier-General; he was made a Major-General August 29, 1777. He was exchanged for General Charles Lee, and resumed his command on Rhode Island after the exchange, continuing there until the evacuation in October, 1779. He died 1788.

cause, as, by such barren conquest their armies were divided at a juncture when a wise policy of concentration would have enabled them to throw themselves with crushing weight upon the ill-disciplined regiments of Washington. But the effect of this diversion was not recognized at the time by those who suffered from the presence of the enemy, and the occupation of Rhode Island was lamented as a great disaster. In January, 1777, Sir Henry Clinton returned to England, leaving in command Lord Percy, who had learned so well at Lexington the modern measures of Chevy Chase. In May, the humane Percy followed the example of his former chief, and the forces were left in charge of Brigadier General Prescott. Prescott was a man advanced in years, of small stature, of harsh temper, who carried, even beyond the common measure of military insolence, his contempt and hatred for those whom he persistently refused to regard in any other light than as rebels against their king. He brought an ill reputation to his new post. When Ethan Allen was taken prisoner, at the time of his fool-hardy attempt on Montreal, Prescott so far forgot himself

as to overwhelm the captor of Ticonderoga with curses, and even threaten him with violence, and the harsh treatment which Allen afterwards received, being placed, hand and foot, in irons, was due to Prescott's orders. This was not forgotten, when, two months later, Prescott himself was taken prisoner by Montgomery, and on his arrival at Philadelphia he was closely confined in the common jail. In September, 1776, he was exchanged for Sullivan, but it cannot be supposed that the treatment which he had received inclined him to look with any more favor upon rebels. Yet to his credit it should be stated that when Colonel Lambert Cadwallader was taken prisoner at Fort Washington, gratitude for some favors shown him by the Colonel's father prompted Prescott to intercede so earnestly that the young officer was released immediately without parole. By his arbitrary rule at Newport, Prescott made himself especially obnoxious. No doubt, representations of the demeanor of British officers must be taken with considerable allowance; but traditions long lingered of the readiness with which Prescott extorted unwilling salutes from Quakers, and of the

merciless severity with which he punished men for refusing to comply with his requisitions. To understand the bitter feeling with which the British commanders were regarded, we must remember that by their orders the islands in the bay had been laid waste, and the seaport towns vexed with heavy contributions. These petty and continuous exactions were more exasperating than the losses inflicted in a more active warfare.

Soon as the British landed on the Island the General Assembly was convened at East Greenwich, but for greater security adjourned to Providence, and the most energetic measures for defence were at once adopted. A brigade of three regiments was ordered to be raised to replace the militia already in the field. The command of the second regiment was given to Joseph Stanton, Jr.,* and under him,

*Col. Joseph Stanton, Jr., was born July 19, 1739; he was Second Lieutenant in a Rhode Island Regiment in the French War in 1759. In 1775, one of the committee of safety; he was made Colonel of one of the Regiments raised for fifteen months, which position he resigned in November, 1777, and Barton was his successor; he was many times member of the General Assembly, and exercised great influence throughout the southern portion of the Colony and later throughout the State. He was the first Senator in Congress from Rhode Island

as Major, was placed William Barton, a native of Warren, not yet twenty-nine years of age, who, when the news came flying on the winds of the repulse of the Americans at Bunker's Hill, at once shouldered his musket and took the road for the camp near Boston, where he entered the service as a volunteer. Here his recognized merit soon raised him to the rank of captain. When the intolerable vexations of the squadron under Wallace rendered necessary some measures of protection, Barton returned to his native state, and for some time was stationed in the neighborhood of Newport, but after the arrival of Clinton he withdrew to Tiverton, and while here received his commission as Major in the second regiment. Thus he had ample opportunity to become familiar with the island, a familiarity which his enterprising spirit was destined to turn soon to profitable use. In the previous December, the same month in which the troops of Clinton had

after the adoption of the Constitution by the convention of which he was a member, and in which he strenuously labored to obtain its rejection. He served the State as Senator four years. From 1801 to March, 1807, he was a Representative in Congress from this State. From this time he disappears from public life.

landed on these shores, Gen. Charles Lee, at that time second in command of the American forces, had been captured by a scouting party of British dragoons, under circumstances little creditable to himself. The capture was keenly felt as a disgrace, and the sense of humiliation was heightened by the fact that the Americans had in their hands no officer of equal rank against whom Lee could be exchanged. The true character of Lee was not understood, and by many, both in Congress and among the people, he was regarded with admiration as a military commander of the highest merit. This mistaken estimate was fully shared by Barton, and while condemned to prolonged inactivity at Tiverton, his enterprising spirit began to revolve plans for surprising a Major-General in the British service, with a view of procuring Lee's release. To quote his own words: "He had a very high opinion of the General's ability, and used the greatest endeavors to get intelligence of some British officers of the same rank, and thus effect an exchange of that great man." Thus one of the most gallant feats of the revolutionary struggle was prompted by misplaced

admiration for one of the most worthless characters which the Revolution brought to notice, for one who at the moment when brave men were thus risking their lives in his behalf, was treacherously intriguing against the cause which he had solemnly pledged himself to uphold. Had Barton known Lee as we know him, we should not have been here to-day.

In what now follows I adhere closely to the account of the adventure as given by Barton himself, and preserved among the manuscript treasures of the Rhode Island Historical Society. On the tenth of June, a Mr. Coffin made his escape from the island, and was brought to Barton's quarters. From him the first information was gained that General Prescott was quartered at the house of Mr. Overing, on the west side of the island, and about a mile from the shore. The house occupied the exact site of the one before which we are now standing, but of the structure as it existed in Prescott's time nothing whatever remains, with the exception of a small portion in the rear. Coffin described so particularly the location and the position of the troops near it, that Barton, to quote again his own words,

"now entered very seriously into the plan of surprising General Prescott." The story was confirmed the next day by a deserter from the British lines. No little wonder has been expressed that Prescott should have had his quarters so far from Newport, and in what seems an exposed position. The English historian Stedman says, that the General was above a mile from any body of troops, that no patrols were posted on the shore, and that he depended solely on a guardship that lay opposite his quarters. He adds that Prescott, after his capture, "was much and deservedly blamed for trusting himself so far from the troops under his command, and for not adopting ordinary measures to secure his safety." Prescott's usual quarters were in the house still standing on the corner of Pelham and Spring streets, Newport.

Now that the plot was ripe for execution, the real difficulties in the way began to reveal themselves. It was of the utmost importance that it should be kept profoundly secret, and Barton was consequently deprived of any assistance from his brother officers. But what was of more consequence was the fact that

all the troops at Tiverton were raw recruits, and in the event of any discovery and resistance, it was by no means certain how far they could be relied upon. After further deliberation, he unfolded the whole scheme to his commanding officer, Colonel Stanton, who pronounced it feasible, and assured him that he might rely upon a hearty co-operation. But, at the same time, Stanton advised him to communicate the object of the expedition to no other person. To five of his brother officers,* however, Barton confided his design of undertaking a secret enterprise, and asked if they had sufficient confidence in him to join in it without being apprized of its precise object. They each professed the most perfect readiness, and at once, in accordance with Barton's suggestion, set about obtaining boats. As at this time the whale fishery was carried on in several towns, there was no difficulty in obtaining in the course of a few days, the five whale boats needed for a party of forty men. The next step was to procure

*The names of these five officers were Captain Ebenezer Adams, Captain Samuel Phillips, Lieutenant James Potter, Lieutenant Joshua Babcock, Lieutenant John Wileox.

the men. As Barton could only call for volunteers, the regiment was ordered to parade, and after a brief address, explaining that a secret expedition against the enemy was about to be undertaken, those who were willing to risk their lives were ordered to advance three paces. At this command the whole regiment advanced. Since it was out of the question for all to go, Barton selected those most expert at rowing. But, to test their skill, he placed a stake in the river above Stone Bridge, near what used to be called the "Old Stills," where the present railroad bridge now stands, and exercised them in pulling round it. An Indian named Daniel Page, who years ago lived beyond the Fall River ponds, loved to tell the story that, in these trials, Barton's boat regularly came in last. Page proposed to make up another crew. His offer was accepted, and after that Barton always led the little flotilla. But proficiency in rowing was not all that Barton cared for. He selected only those on whom perfect reliance could be placed.

On the evening of the fifth of July, just one year after independence had been declared, the little

party left their encampment at Tiverton. The following is Colonel Stanton's order, which I have copied from the original in the cabinet of the Historical Society.

HEADQUARTERS, CAMP AT TIVERTON, }
5th of July, 1777. }

LIEUT.-COL. BARTON:

You will proceed to the Island of Newport, and attack the Enemy when and where you think proper, and make Report to me of your proceeding.

JOS. STANTON, JR., COLO.

A storm of unusual violence separated the boats in Mount Hope Bay, and on the evening of the sixth, only two had succeeded in reaching Bristol. The third arrived a little later. Before retiring Barton took his party to Hog Island, and there, in full view of the British ships, he for the first time disclosed his plan. They were astonished at its boldness, but were not deterred by the evident risk which it involved. They then returned to Bristol, after a solemn pledge to reveal nothing respecting the purpose of the expedition. On the evening of the seventh, they passed over to Warwick Neck, which afforded the best point of departure, as it was essen-

tial for their purpose that they should run down on the west side of Prudence. But another severe storm delayed their departure, so that it was not until the evening of the ninth, at about nine o'clock, that they finally left Warwick Neck. Before leaving, the men were numbered, and each one appointed to his place. The party consisted in all of forty-one, officers included. Among them was a black servant of Barton, who, according to his own account, played no mean part in the adventure. The man on whom Barton most relied was John Hunt,* who belonged to Colonel Elliott's† regiment of artillery.

*Many years after these events, John Hunt, bent with years, sent a memorial to Congress, narrating his services to his country in his earlier days, and especially in this adventure, and praying for some pecuniary help, being poor and destitute, without any property whatever.

†Colonel Robert Elliott was made Colonel of the Rhode Island Regiment of Artillery ordered to be raised in December, 1776, for fifteen months service. At the expiration of his term of service Colonel Elliott reënlisted and continued in the military service of the State until May, 1780, when he resigned and entered the civil service as a member of the General Assembly from Newport.

He was despatched to Newport, under the direction of the Council of War, on the twelfth of July, 1777, to bring such articles for General Prescott and Major Barrington as they desired. He died in October, 1781, while in the civil service of the State.

He was a native of Portsmouth, and had been brought up not far from Prescott's quarters, and was of course well acquainted with the locality. Two others of the party, James Weaver and Samuel Cory,* also came from the same neighborhood, and were of much service as guides. Silently the little party gathered about their leader to receive his last commands. In a low voice he strictly enjoined them "to preserve the strictest order; to have no thought of plunder; to observe profound silence, and to take with them no spirituous liquors." More judicious directions could hardly be conceived. His brief address closed with a solemn invocation of the divine blessing. Each man raised his hat and proceeded to take his appointed station in the boats. The commander at Warwick Neck was directed to keep a sharp lookout, and if he heard the reports of

*Samuel Cory was a brave and gallant soldier: he was a member of Sullivan's Expedition, fought at Trenton and Princeton and Monmouth; afterwards entered the privateering service; was on board the "General Arnold" when that privateer was captured by the British, but, in company with James Weaver, escaped by swimming to the Connecticut shore, and afterwards returned to Rhode Island, where he lived to an advanced age, being, at the time Mrs. Williams published her memoir of Barton, eighty-six years old.

three muskets to come to the north end of Prudence and take them off. So, under the favoring stars of the summer night, the little expedition set forth on its perilous and uncertain errand. Each man was well aware what his fate would be should detection follow. Barton led in the forward boat, with a pole ten feet long having a handkerchief tied at the end, so that his course might be easily distinguished. With muffled oars they pulled between Prudence and Patience islands, to avoid the enemy's vessels which lay off Hope, and then hugging close the west side of Prudence, rounded its southern extremity in safety, but going so nigh the enemy's ships that they could distinctly hear the sentinel's cry, "All's well." When near the Rhode Island shore they heard a noise like the running of horses, but a brief pause convinced them that it was due to some accidental cause, and in a few minutes they touched the land. On reaching the shore a man was left in charge of each of the boats, while the rest of the party, formed in five divisions, marched silently forward. A deep gully, worn by the water through a bank, helped to conceal them, and they gained the house in safety.

The entrance was by three doors, on the south, east and west. Three of the five squads were ordered to attack the doors, the fourth remained to guard the road, the fifth was to act as circumstances might require, while Barton's black servant was enjoined to keep close behind his master. As the party approached, they had the guard-house on their left, near which General Smith, second in command, was posted, while on their right, at the distance of two hundred yards, were the quarters of a company of light horse. A sentinel* was also stationed about twenty-five yards from the gate. In the house, besides Prescott and Major Barrington, his aid, were

*The name of this sentinel was Graham. He belonged to the twenty-second regiment, was taken to Providence with his commander, and was then consigned to the care of the Sheriff, with orders of the Council of War to confine him in close gaoL Early in August he was recommended for exchange with Samuel Buffum, who had been captured by the British, and had been permitted to come up from Newport on his parole for the purpose of effecting an exchange. This arrangement was agreed to by the Council of War and Graham was placed on board the Cartel, from which, while under the care of our people, he made his escape. It was an unfortunate termination for Buffum, for the Council of War refused to make any other arrangement, but advised him to return to Newport and surrender his parole; rather than to do this he ran away to sea.

Mr. Overing and his son, with several servants. As the gate was opened the sentinel put the usual question. No answer was returned, and the party continued to advance, a row of trees preventing their number from being clearly seen. He, therefore, repeated the question, without being alarmed, when Barton answered, "Friends." "Advance and give the countersign," was the response. "We have none," said Barton, "but have you seen any deserters to-night?" Before the man could reply he was seized by John Hunt, his musket was taken from him, his arms pinioned, and he himself threatened with instant death if he made the slightest noise. When asked if Prescott was within, he was so much frightened that at first his tongue refused its office, but at length he moved his hand towards the house, and answered "yes." In a moment each division had reached its station, and the door was forced. It chanced that the first chamber entered was the one occupied by Overing himself, who, when asked where the General was, pointed in great agitation to the room beneath. Not believing his statement, Barton entered the next chamber, where he found Overing's

son. At this moment Prescott's voice was heard calling, and guided by the sound, Barton descended to the lower story and found the General sitting upon the bed. The latter made no attempt to disguise his identity, and promptly, though we can imagine with no little surprise, acknowledged himself a prisoner. The story has been often repeated, how the door of the room was burst through by the vigorous application of the negro's head; but Barton, in his narrative, makes no mention of the incident. Prescott begged the privilege of putting on his clothes, but as the business suffered no delay, he was only allowed his "waistcoat, breeches and slippers." Before they got into the boats, however, his coat was handed him. Major Barrington, at the first alarm, had leaped out of a chamber window, but was immediately secured; and taking with them also the sentinel, the party started to return. Rather carrying than leading the captive General, they hastened by the most direct route across the fields, the prisoner getting badly scratched as they dashed through the bushes. In the hurry his sword had been left behind, and Page, the Indian, returned to the house

and got it. But the boats had no sooner pushed off, than the alarm was given, and it is said that in an hour's time the whole island was aroused; yet no pursuit was made, and the British army was at a loss to know what had become of its commander, until a message came the next day informing them that he was safe in Providence. The tracks of the captors could be clearly traced as far as the water side, but what had afterwards become of them no man could imagine. Prescott seems to have made the best of what must have been to him a most mortifying adventure. Asking if Barton commanded, he remarked, "You have made a bold push to-night," and added nothing further, except to express the hope that he might not be hurt. His apprehension was not unnatural, and doubtless would not have been any less had he been aware that one of the party who had taken him, Thomas Austin, was a man who had been sentenced by his order to receive three hundred lashes, for refusing to yoke his team for the purpose of dragging a cannon across the island. But Barton hastened to assure his prisoner that he had no personal injury to fear.

The party reached Warwick Neck at daybreak, having been absent six hours and a half. Soon as they landed, Barton gave orders that Prescott should have the best breakfast that could be provided, and an express was sent to Major General Spencer, at Providence. To that place the captive commander was conveyed in a coach, followed by a great multitude, attracted by the novel spectacle. Like all men of his rank, at that period, Prescott was exceedingly careful about his personal appearance; and directly on his arrival, the late John Howland was summoned to dress his hair according to the fashion of the day. Not long after a flag of truce came up the river bringing his wardrobe, his purse, his hair powder and a plentiful supply of perfumery. Notwithstanding his own harshness, so long as he remained in Providence, he seems to have been treated with entire respect. The third day after he was captured, he was taken to Connecticut, and here he would seem to have met with somewhat harder usage, for on the twentieth of July Colonel Paterson, the Adjutant General of the British forces, in a personal interview with Washington, complained of the

•

treatment which Prescott was receiving as likely, with his age and infirmities, to result in fatal consequences. Washington, in reply disclaimed any particular knowledge of the facts, but "mentioned the case of Colonel Allen." Prescott was afterwards sent to New York and exchanged for Lee.

After a brief rest, Barton and his gallant band started on their return to Tiverton. During the progress of the expedition, his injunctions had been strictly observed. Though it is said that Overing's house contained some valuable plunder, not a thing was taken from it. But now that the adventure had been crowned with such complete success, the restraints of discipline were naturally relaxed. With a liberal supply of pork and rum, the courage of the party rose to such a pitch that before passing Bristol Ferry they seriously meditated the capture of the entire British squadron. On reaching the camp at Tiverton, Barton mounted a woodpile and recounted to an enthusiastic audience the story of his exploit. He had dared much, and he had fairly earned the plaudits which were liberally bestowed upon him. In all the main particulars of

.



the affair I have followed his account, but there were forty others who shared with him the danger, and each of the forty had his own story to relate. That these stories, as they were told years after, should agree in all details was hardly to be expected. Thus, Barton makes no mention of the bold act of Daniel Page, in returning for the sword. I have also been informed by a highly respected friend in Fall River that Page, who died in 1829, at the age of eighty, always maintained that the expedition started from Tiverton, and not from Warwick Neck. But the narrative of Barton is very explicit on this point, and moreover the first printed account of the affair, published only two days later in the *Providence Gazette*, (July twelfth, 1777,) states that the party "went in five boats from Warwick Neck." The aged Indian's memory was therefore probably at fault. The most inexplicable contradictions relate to the negro, who for his capacity of self-multiplication, may be well reckoned a rival of the famed nurses of Washington. In the list of those who went with Barton, but one negro is mentioned, Tack Sisson, who belonged in Tiverton, and is put

down as boat-steerer. In the *Life of Barton*, by Mrs. Williams, this negro is called Guy Watson, and he is said to have been a "black servant of the Colonel." But in a subsequent note he is identified with Sisson. The *Providence Journal* for November first, 1821, contains an obituary notice of a negro named Prince, who had died in Plymouth a few days before, of whom it is expressly stated that he was the one who broke open the door. On the other hand a venerable correspondent in Brooklyn, N. Y., writes me that when a boy, in Pomfret, Connecticut, he was well acquainted with an old negro, named Quako, who always claimed to have been the negro who was with Barton. In Peterson's history the same negro is mentioned, and he is even said to have been a servant of Prescott.*

The bold enterprise of Barton met with a prompt and hearty recognition. The General Assembly passed a vote of thanks, and ordered that a sum of money should be distributed among the party. The

*Probably one cause of this confusion was the habit these negroes had of assuming the names of the families with whom they successively lived.

commissioned officers of the expedition were also recommended for promotion. Nor was the enthusiasm confined to his native State. Wherever the news spread, it made a great impression. It came at a period of discouragement, when men were weary of the long inactivity of Spencer, and were watching with apprehension the advance of Burgoyne; and of however slight importance in its bearing on military operations, it had a prodigious effect in rousing the popular spirit. Thatcher writes, in his Journal that when the intelligence reached the northern army, "it occasioned great joy and exultation." It even lifted the dark cloud which hung over the face of Washington, who at once sent a dispatch to Congress, announcing the capture of Prescott, and describing it as "a bold enterprise." Some years after, Colonel Barton chanced to be in New York, and called upon Washington. The General was indisposed and had refused all callers, but hearing the name of his visitor mentioned, he asked if it was the Barton who had captured Prescott, and when answered in the affirmative, ordered him to be shown in at once. Barton was

made a Brevet Colonel in the Continental army, and Congress voted him a sword, which is still preserved as a precious heirloom by his descendants. This sword was not presented to Barton till after the close of the struggle, when it was accompanied with a most complimentary letter from General Knox, the Secretary of War, who wrote that, "to the expressive approbation of the supreme national authority, was added the unanimous applause of the army." How the news of Prescott's capture was received by His Majesty George the Third, history does not inform us, but Louis XVI., it is said, laughed heartily when he heard the story, and gave instructions to his consul at New York to obtain from the gallant leader a detailed account of the affair. Accordingly the consul wrote to Thomas Lloyd Halsey, of Providence, who acted as agent for the French government, and, at his request, Barton drew up a narrative, which is without doubt the one preserved in the cabinet of the Historical Society, of which I have made use. After the fashion of the day, the exploit was also commemorated in a ballad, and the tradition lingers that after Prescott's return

to Newport, a lad on one occasion was asked to sing in his presence, who unexpectedly burst forth with the lines that told how Barton

“with his sling and stone
Did bring the great Goliath down.”

The old General had the good sense to laugh at the joke, and rewarded the minstrel with half a crown.

Barton derived little benefit from his promotion. In May, of the following year, the British sent an expedition to destroy a number of boats collected in Kickemuit river, which, on its return through Warren and Bristol, began pillaging and burning the houses. With his accustomed promptitude, Barton hastened from Providence in advance of the main body sent by General Sullivan. Collecting some two hundred volunteers, he attacked the British forces before they reached the ferry, and while rising in his stirrups to urge on his men, received a bullet wound in the hip, which disqualified him for a long time from active service. For three months he did not leave his bed. Greatly to

his regret he was prevented from taking part in the expedition of General Sullivan. At the close of the war, the State, in consideration of his services, made good the depreciation in his pay, and conferred on him the estate of a refugee family in Newport. It is not pleasant to add that in later years the veteran became involved in a law suit in Vermont, growing out of his purchase of a township in that State, and refusing to bow to a decision which he looked upon as wrong, was detained in the town of Danville fourteen years. The sum in dispute was trifling, but Barton preferred this long separation from his family rather than pay what he had declared he would not. The refusal was eminently characteristic of the man. As, however, his place of detention was the village inn, where he was always sure of an interested circle to hear the story which it is said he was never disinclined to tell, it must not be supposed that his imprisonment was attended with much privation. When Lafayette was in this country in 1824, learning that his old friend was in this unfortunate dilemma, he generously discharged the debt without Barton's knowl-

edge, and the latter was set at liberty, and returned to his native State. On the seventh of July, 1828, he visited for the last time, with a party of friends, the scene of his exploit, and described with singular precision its successive incidents. Colonel Barton died at Providence, on the twenty-second of October, 1831, having reached the ripe age of eighty-five years.

To this unvarnished recital of the bold exploit which we celebrate to-day, why need I add further words of praise? It was one of those achievements that need only to be narrated; it speaks for itself,—to say more is to gild refined gold. It illustrates qualities that win instant recognition; which men will regard with admiration as long as manhood itself shall be held in honor. Yet I may be pardoned if, in conclusion, I dwell with some satisfaction on the fact that these qualities have been always peculiarly characteristic of Rhode Island. As a community, we have been not seldom criticised for showing a lack of that capacity for organic political action which has been justly the boast of our more powerful neighbors. It has been said that with us individual-

ism has run to seed, and that the spirit of our first settlers may be traced through all our history in an undisciplined self-will fatal to the best social growth. I am not disposed to deny all basis for this indictment, but may not something be said on the other side? If somewhat deficient in burgher and parish virtues, may we not claim, as a partial compensation, the marked development of personal character, which has been such an unmistakable characteristic of our little State? This exploit of Barton,—was it not the evident exploit of a man used to think and act for himself? Was it not stamped, from its first inception to its final accomplishment, with the pluck, the audacity, the adroit conduct, may I not add, the success, which have always marked the undertakings of the genuine Rhode Islander? Was not the spirit that prompted the capture of Prescott the same spirit that planned the destruction of the Gaspee, that suggested the daring feat of Major Talbot,*

*The bold exploit of Major Silas Talbot in capturing the armed galley Pigot, is perhaps the act by which he is best remembered. The Pigot was a staunch schooner of about two hundred and fifty tons, mounting twelve guns, and manned by forty-five men, under Lieutenant Dunlap of the British navy. Moored at the mouth of the East pas-

that still later made Lake Erie a household word on all our lips? Was it not the same spirit that gave Rhode Island its early eminence in the arts of peace, and led an intelligent traveller to declare, in the very year in which Prescott was taken by Barton, that in the town of Providence were to be found the most intelligent body of merchants on the continent. I would not seem to depreciate the value of organic action, and of due subordination to social and ecclesiastical traditions, but it is after all individual character that supplies the "choice nobility and flower" of life, and however limited its territorial bounds,

sage of Narragansett Bay, she completely barred its entrance, and was for a long period a great annoyance to the people and to the army. Talbot conceived the idea of capturing her in the night, and finally obtained the consent of General Sullivan to make the attempt. Embarking a party of seventy-five men, in the sloop Hawk, which he obtained from Providence, he dropped quietly down by the two British forts which guarded the ascent of that branch of the Bay, and boldly boarded the enemy, which in a few moments became his prize. He immediately sailed with her out into the sound and landed his prisoners the next morning at Stonington, thus successfully ending an act characterized by his contemporaries as one of "infernal bravery," and branding its author in the British reports as "one of the greatest arch rebels in nature." Major Talbot was born in Rhode Island about 1750, and died in New York, 1813.

that community can never be reckoned small whose most distinctive product is fearless, enterprising, self-reliant men ; men who, if often headstrong and often obstinate, yet have shrunk from no sacrifice and quailed before no danger. Need we blush for an ancestry that boasts more than one

“ Stem
Of that victorious stock? ”

NAMES OF THE OFFICERS AND MEN ENGAGED IN
THE CAPTURE OF PRESCOTT.

OFFICERS :

WILLIAM BARTON,	ANDREW STANTON,
EBENEZER ADAMS,	SAMUEL POTTER,
JOHN WILCOX.	

NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS :

JOSHUA BABCOCK,	SAMUEL PHILLIPS.
-----------------	------------------

PRIVATES :

Benjamin Prew,	Clark Crandall,
James Potter,	Sampson George,
Henry Fisher,	Joseph Ralph,
James Parker,	Jedediah Grenale,
Joseph Guild,	Richard Hare,
Nathan Smith,	Daniel Wall,
Isaac Brown,	Joseph Denis,
Billington Crumb,	William Bruff,
James Haines,	Charles Havitt,
Samuel Apis,	Pardon Cory,
Alderman Crank,	Thomas Wilcox,
Oliver Simmons,	Jeremiah Thomas,
Jack Sherman,	John Hunt,
Joel Briggs,	Thomas Austin,
Clark Packard,	Daniel Page, an Indian ;
Samuel Cory,	Tack Sisson, negro boat steerer ;
James Weaver,	Howe or Whiting, boat steerer.

This list is taken from Mrs. Williams's Biography of Colonel Barton.

BALLADS AND POETRY

OF THE

EVENT.

EPIGRAM UPON GENERAL PRESCOTT.

FROM THE LONDON CHRONICLE,
Sept. 23rd, 1777.

“The Handkerchief!” — Othello cries,
(The Handkerchief, the stage replies,)
I prize it more than riches.
A different note, poor Prescott roars,
For nought resounds th’ Atlantic shores
But where? Oh! where’s my breeches?

ON GENERAL PRESCOTT
BEING CARRIED OFF NAKED, UNANOINTED, UNANEALED.

FROM THE LONDON CHRONICLE,
Sept. 27th, 1777.

What various lures there are to ruin man:
Woman the first and foremost all bewitches,
A nymph thus spoiled a General’s mighty plan,
And gave him to the foe without his breeches.

A DIALOGUE
BETWEEN GENERAL PRESCOTT AND THE OFFICER OF THE PARTY
THAT TOOK HIM PRISONER.

FROM THE LONDON CHRONICLE,
Sept. 30th, 1777.

Prescott.

Says the General, when taken to him who commanded,
This surprise shows more cunning than skill;

Officer.

Says the other, an exchange may now be demanded,
Till then you may rave as you will;
Lee now will return, if the Howes ever do,
If not, you'll in durance remain:
Should Lee be transported, your Honor will too
Bear equal confinement and pain.

Prescott.

Like cowards you run when we meet in the field,
Now stay to receive us as men.

Officer.

Says the other, delaying will force you to yield,
Yet we skirmish and fight now and then:

At Lexington races you shewed a light heel,
Bunker's hill proves it plain we can fight:
The Hessian battalions most knowingly feel,
At Trenton discovered their fright.

Never say we are cowards, of Boston possessed,
Which Howe, in a dreary dismay,
Left in haste much behind him and thought himself blessed,
To get his light baggage away.

You feel we can fight when occasion presents,
Your muster returns make it plain,
Or over such cowards, what is it prevents
To inflict your tyrannical chain?

Such manœuvres as these will not ministry please,
Next Christmas will make it appear,
The . . . too, will be quite robbed of his ease,
With two such retreats in one year.

THE CAPTURE OF PRESCOTT.

This ballad appears in the *Manufacturers' and Farmers' Journal*, June 25th, 1835, with the note that it was taken from the *Plymouth Memorial*. It is further stated that after General Prescott's return to Newport he was invited to dine with the Admiral; on the ship were a number of prisoners, among whom was a lad of thirteen years, who, the First Lieutenant said, could shame them all in singing. After the wine was brought upon the table, the boy was introduced and told to sing. He complained that he knew none but Yankee songs, whereat he was commanded to sing such as he knew,—the result was the following:

'Twas on a dark and stormy night,
The winds and waves did roar;
Brave Barton then with twenty men,
Went down unto the shore.

And in a whale boat they set off
To Rhodes's Island fair,
To catch a red-coat general
Who then resided there.

Through British fleets and guard boats strong
They held their dangerous way,
Till they arrived unto their port,
And then did not delay.

A tawney son of Afric's race
Then through the ravine led,
And entering then the Overing house
They found him in his bed.

But to get in they had no means,
Except poor Cuffee's head,
Who beat the door down, then rushed in
And seized him in his bed.

Stop, let me put my breeches on,
The General then did pray.
Your breeches, massa, I will take,
For dress we cannot stay.

Then through rye stubble him they led,
With shoes and breeches none,
And placed him in their boat quite snug,
And from the shore were gone.

Soon the alarm was sounded loud ;
The Yankees they have come
And stolen Prescott from his bed.
And him they've carried home.

The drums were beat, sky rockets flew,
The soldiers shouldered arms
And marched around the grounds they knew.
Filled with most dire alarms.

But through the fleet with muffled oars,
They held their devious way,
And landed him on 'Gansett shore,
Where Briton held no sway.

When unto the land they came
Where rescue there was none,
A damned bold push, the General said,
Of prisoners I am one.

THE CAPTURE OF PRESCOTT.

This ballad is taken from Mrs. Williams's Biography of Colonel Barton (page 129), published at Providence, 1839. Where she obtained it is not stated; she likewise states the same story of the lad's singing it at one of General Prescott's carousals after his return to Newport.

The day was spent, the evening fair,
When Barton marched his men with care
Down to the river's side;
And unto them most nobly said—
Let none embark who are afraid
To cross the swelling tide.

But they, like hardy sons of Mars,
Inured to hardships and to wars,
Most nobly did reply:
With manly rage our souls on fire,
We scorn the thought for to retire,
We conquer will or die.

Thus did they cross and march away
Where Prescott's host encamped lay,
On hostile measures bent;
Young David took this bloody Saul
And sentry, aid-de-camp and all;
Back to the boat they went.

You watchful host who round him kept,
To guard your General while he slept;
Now you have lost your head,
Since they from freedom's happy shore,
Returned and brought their booty o'er,
The hero from his bed.

Go to your king and to him say,
Call home your troops, call them away,
Or Prescott's fate they'll share.
For Bartou, with his sling and stone,
Will bring the great Goliah down
And catch him in a snare.

THE HARP AND THE SWORD.

BY REV. F. DENISON.

Read at the celebration of the Centenary of the Capture of Prescott, July 10th, 1877.

The harp and the sword have in fellowship rung
Since the days when the harpstring by Jubal was strung;
For the beat of man's bosom in music is breathed
Wherever unselfish devotion is wreathed,
And over all nations shall peans be sung,
While deeds of brave daring shall kindle the tongue.

As fragrance and beauty together are worn,
Sweet song and the right are in unison born;
Divinely united on Palestine's hills,
Wide over the earth have resounded their thrills;
King David, inspired with his harp and his sword,
Yet wakens our hearts in the name of the Lord.

Adown the long ages with raptured increase,
Speak the lyres of the bards that immortalize Greece :
 The sword of Achilles and Hector's great shield
 Still gleam in their glory on poesy's field ;
And the pass of Thermopylae echoes the tread
Of warriors whose names are to melodies wed.

The story of Latium in lyrics is told,
Still sounding the deeds of the brave days of old ;
 What spirits once lifted the eagle and gave
 Can never be silenced and wrapped in the grave :
Yea, higher and nobler than capitol dome
Shall stand the bold lives of the heroes of Rome.

The chants of proud Albion—queen of the waves—
Exalt on her banners the names of her braves,—
 In measures of Chaucer and Tennyson's lays
 From idyls of Alfred to Wellington's praise—
A chorus of voices in lofty refrain
As deathless in cadence as waves of the main.

Men's tributes to valor are broader in sweep
Than winds on the mountains, or waves on the deep ;
 The voices of nature, sublime though their swell,
 Are but aids to the chords that of victories tell :
Far grander than billows, or thunders that roll,
Are the struggles of men, and their triumphs of soul.

Our Heaven-favored land is the home of high song,
In the thronging of right and defeat of the wrong,
Here manhood, confronting oppression's decree,
Has valiantly battled for noblest degree;
Here pilgrims inspired the unjust to eschew,
The sword of the Lord and of Gideon drew.

Devotion to right and abhorrence of wrong
In essence are one, and invincibly strong;
True love and true hate are the God-given poles
Of the needle of justice in rational souls,
And therefore the men who for righteousness pray,
Are the men who their Agags on battlefields slay.

Still the drum-beat of Freedom rolls over these hills,
Still fervid the life pours its rallying thrills;
And the war-songs and shouts of our patriot sires,
With their volleying guns, and their glowing camp-fires,
Can never die out of the hearts of their sons
While in them the blood of humanity runs.

With song and with sword we are gathered to-day,
Our debt to a daring achievement to pay,
To catch from the orator's magical spell
The thrill of the patriot scene as it fell—
An action that proudly our country may own,
The courage that bearded the lion alone.

These Veterans true who have honored the belt,
Responsive to patriot heart-throbbings felt,

With sages from History's sacred retreats,
And poets and teachers from classical seats,
At the call of the bugle and the roll of drum,
To list to the chivalrous story have come.

The mantle of midnight is thick on the shore,
Soft hushed are the night-winds, and muffled the oar;
The horrified sentry is griped by the throat;
Lo, Prescott is captured and sped to the boat;
Swift passing the guns from the frigates that frowned,
Brave Barton flies back with the Englishman bound.

Rhode Island shall sing of her Barton and Greene,
Names destined to live in imperishing sheen,
And Hopkins and Perry — the leaders of braves —
Heroic in flight on our hills and our waves —
Their records regarded more precious than gold,
As virtue is treasure of value untold.

This isle of our pride, on the hem of the sea,
The gem of our strand, and the home of the free,
Of captains and patriot battles may boast,
Bright shining as beacons on Liberty's coast —
Bold deeds that shall quicken fond History's tongue,
And evermore bloom in the sweetness of song.

Nor when on our nation fell treason's mad stroke,
And the standard of Freedom was wrapped in its smoke,
Did the sons of Rhode Island their fathers forget,
But instantly sprung the old swords rewhet.
And, with songs on their lips, 'neath the Stars took the field,
Devoting their breasts for their country a shield.

Thus warmly are wedded the true and the brave,
And the heart keeps the nuptials it anciently gave;
Nor ever, till oaks on our mountains, shall die,
And the galaxies falter and fade in the sky,
Shall valor and virtue be shorn of reward,
And soul-stirring song be divorced from the sword.

P O E M.

By GEORGE W. PETTES.

Read at the celebration of the Centenary of the Capture of Prescott, July 10th, 1877.

Albeit Chamberlain with Hampton fights,
In some particulars a State *has* rights.

Whether to march, or sail, or ride, or feed,
Each claims a way to celebrate a deed.

Thus several States their several fancies take,
And old Rhode Island institutes a "bake."

She was the first to quarrel with intrigue,
She was the last to join the federal league;
She is the firmest in her sense of right,
She is the truest in the loyal fight.
One of the smallest of the four times ten,
She is the greatest in her laws and men.
She is the best, great schemes to undertake,
And she alone can give the perfect "bake."

We have this merry way of keeping tryst,
When choice assignments grace our honored list,
As now we celebrate the jocund hour,
When the brave Barton humbled British power.

'Tis an old story every school boy knows,
That grows in zest, as he in stature grows,
How, when the night was dark, the stars asleep,
An honest crew pulled soft o'er waters deep
The boat that bore the fearless man whose name
Forth from that night outshone a star aflame.
How, noiseless as the perfumed southern wind,
And with its speed, they left the shore behind;
Passed the black frigates, hiding fires of hell;
Heard the contented sentinel's "All's well;"
Gained the still port, the silent landing made,
Sought their dumb leader and each sign obeyed.
Quickly he set the guard, the mansion found,
Few faithful warders are disposed around;
Followed by chosen three he gains the room
Behind whose door lies lord and aid and groom.
Bolted. A signal given, and, 'tis said,
A negro broke the panel with his head.
Out from the window sprang the official's aid,
But to be caught by cunning ambuscade.
And he, the chief, for whom this champion raid,
Peril encountered, danger dared, was made,
Must swiftly change the symbols of command,
For prisoner's gyves that stay the ambitious hand.

All this and more—the tale you know full well—
All this and more, the grave historians tell;
Reward, promotion, resolutions planned,
The sword, the colonelcy, the tract of land —

But do they tell you how a lawyer knave,
Would gain the gift that Barton cared to save,
Would so debase his manhood and himself,
To hunt a hero for an ounce of pelf?

That hero saved the State for me and you,
But to a fool were paltry dollars due.
Our noble brave was thrown in jail for debt,
Where villain lawyers would have kept him yet.

Do they inform you who it was that heard
The tale infernal, whose kind heart was stirred,
To pay the petty lucre that the law
Demanded for its foul, insatiate maw?

Ah! many a time and oft that generous friend
Gave of the treasure he would scorn to lend:
Made us the creatures obligation names,
When she reviews her unexacted claims.

Gave of his counsel, led our armies on,
Chivalric marquis, till the fight was won,
And shall we be unmindful of the debt
To thy blest memory, gallant Lafayette?

For one brief moment let the earnest strain
Your pulses tingle, your approval gain,
While at the dual shrine we reverent bend
Of the brave hero and the hero's friend.

Give honor to our patriot sires.

 Their history is ours and Fame's;

They kindled Freedom's altar fires.

 Eternal glory gilds their names.

Then gather in the council hall,

 Or 'neath the boughs of towering tree,

Or near the crystal waterfall,

 Or in the vale or on the lea.

Where waves the palm o'er Sabine's tide,

 Where broad Potomac still is free,

Where proud Missouri's waters glide,

 Where Narragansett seeks the sea.

Recount the heroes of the past,

 Who patriots from the tyrant freed,

And first 'mong memories that last,

 Repeat the tale of Barton's deed.

And speak of him who left the home

 Of luxury and love and power,

And hastened o'er the Atlantic foam

 To aid in freedom's trial hour.

Oh! not till earth has ceased to move,

 Till the last star in heaven has set,

Shall freemen's hearts forget to love,

 To bless the name of Lafayette.

676
7.14.5
1.2.12

